



Environmental Fact Sheet

YARD WASTE COMPOSTING

Across the nation, composting is gaining increased attention as an environmentally sound way to manage yard wastes. Yard wastes are such materials as leaves, grass clippings, brush, and tree prunings. Many communities and 12 states have banned yard wastes from landfills. Composting diverts yard wastes from landfills and combustors. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends composting yard wastes. Not only is composting sensible from an environmental perspective, it also effectively converts yard wastes into a useful soil additive or mulch.

What Are the Facts About Yard Wastes?

Yard wastes account for nearly a fifth (over 31 million tons) of all garbage generated in the U. S. each year, making yard wastes the second largest component (by weight) of the municipal solid waste stream. The amount of yard waste generated varies considerably from region to region, during different seasons, and from one year to the next. In fact, during peak months (primarily summer and fall), yard wastes can represent as much as 25 to 50 percent of municipal solid waste.

Why Not Put Yard Wastes in Landfills?

Since these materials are relatively clean and biode-

gradable, disposal in landfills may be unnecessary and wastes space. In addition, as yard wastes decompose in landfills, they generate methane gas and acidic leachate. Methane is a colorless, explosive gas that is released as bacteria decompose organic materials in landfills. If methane is not controlled at a landfill, it can seep underground and into nearby buildings, where it has the potential to explode. Yard wastes also contribute acidity that can make other waste constituents more mobile and therefore more toxic.

Yard wastes also are generally unsuitable for combustion in incinerators due to their high moisture

content, which can inhibit complete burning. When burned, yard wastes emit certain gases which contribute to the formation of smog-causing nitrogen oxides.

Why Not Burn Leaves And Other Yard Wastes?

Burning leaves and other yard wastes pollutes the air and can lead to uncontrolled fires. Leaf smoke can make breathing difficult for people who suffer from asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, or allergies. A number of states currently ban leaf burning, and some communities either ban leaf burning or restrict when it can take place.

What Is Composting?

Composting is the controlled decomposition of organic matter by microorganisms, which produces a rich soil amendment. Composting is an ancient practice, dating back to the beginning of agriculture. In the 1930s, scientists discovered that the microorganisms that break down organic matter could be used to create a compost pile in the garden or in a bin. Today, composting has become a popular way to recycle yard and kitchen waste, and it is a key component of sustainable living. Composting is a natural process that can be used to create a rich soil amendment for your garden or lawn. It is a simple and easy way to recycle yard and kitchen waste, and it is a key component of sustainable living.

How Can Compost Be Used?

Compost can be used for a variety of landscaping projects. It can be used to improve the soil around trees and shrubs, and it can be used as a soil additive for house plants. Compost can enhance soil texture, increase the ability of the soil to absorb air and water, suppress weed growth, decrease erosion, and reduce the need to apply chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Following are some other successful uses of compost:

- Farmers use compost for enhancing crops and for soil fertility.
- Landscapers use compost as a soil amendment and for decorative purposes at properties, golf courses, and athletic fields. Landscapers also use compost

to water seedlings and carry out re-vegetation projects.

- Homeowners use compost for enhancing lawns and forests, and for improving soil in flower beds.
- Homeowners use compost to improve the soil in their gardens, lawns, and forests, and for improving soil in flower beds.

What Materials Can Be Composted?

Compost can be made from a wide variety of materials, including yard waste, kitchen waste, and manure. The most common materials used for composting are yard waste (grass clippings, leaves, twigs, etc.), kitchen waste (vegetable scraps, fruit peels, etc.), and manure (horse, cow, etc.). Compost can also be made from other materials, such as newspaper, cardboard, and fine wood shavings. Compost can be used for a variety of purposes, including improving soil texture, increasing the ability of the soil to absorb air and water, suppressing weed growth, decreasing erosion, and reducing the need to apply chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Compost can also be used for decorative purposes at properties, golf courses, and athletic fields. Landscapers also use compost

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Can Christmas Trees Be Used?

Many communities have begun programs to reuse the more than 30 million trees discarded each year after the holiday season. The trees are picked up at

How Can I Set Up A Compost Pile?

Creating a compost pile is easy. You can set up a compost pile in a corner of your yard with few or no plants. Choose a level

the curb or collected at dropoff centers through the second week of January. Then they are ground into small pieces, or chippings, and used as mulch or landscape material. The program is free for most communities, but some communities, especially cities and towns, are charged a fee for pickup of or other services. For more information, call EPA's Office of Solid Waste at (202) 368-5000.

The *Handbook* also contains over 75 practical tips for reducing and recycling solid waste. Another publication, the *Decision-Making Guide to Solid Waste Management*, provides an overview of the various options available to communities, such as recycling, incineration, and landfills, and discusses the environmental problems that can result from each. It is available for no cost.

For more EPA Hotline Call Mailbox, through Friday, February 1, 1991, call (800) 424-6342 and toll-free in Alaska and Hawaii, (907) 424-6342. For more information, call (202) 368-5000. EPA's Office of Solid Waste also has a 24-hour hotline, (202) 368-5000, for information on hazardous waste. For more information, call (202) 368-5000.

Solid Waste (OS-305), 401 M Street SW., Washington, DC 20460.

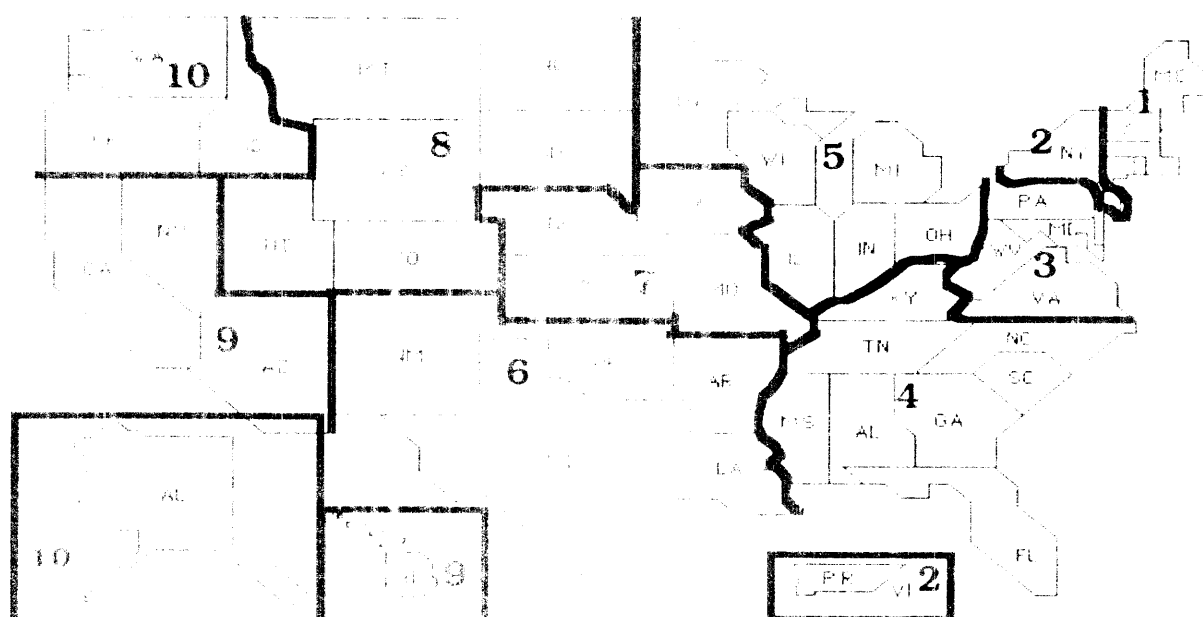
Another report for decision makers, *Yard Waste Composting: A Study of Eight Programs*, is available for a fee from the National Technical Information Services (NTIS). Call (800) 487-4650 and ask for publication number PB90-163-114. EPA is also developing a *Guide to Composting* that will assist policy makers in determining what type of composting they should promote in their community and in planning and operating compost facilities.

In addition, EPA has drafted a report entitled *Markets for Compost*, which provides information on markets and uses for compost. These two documents should be available in early 1991 from the Hotline.

How Can I Learn More About Composting?

EPA has developed several publications about composting. For example, EPA has a booklet entitled *The Environmental Consumer's Handbook* that describes how to set up a backyard

EPA Regions



EPA Regional Offices

Region 1

U.S. EPA—Region 1
J.F.K. Federal Building
Boston, MA 02203
(617) 565-3715

Region 2

U.S. EPA—Region 2
26 Federal Plaza
New York, NY 10278
(212) 264-2657

Region 3

U.S. EPA—Region 3
841 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
(215) 597-9800

Region 4

U.S. EPA—Region 4
345 Courtland Street, NE
Atlanta, GA 30365
(404) 347-4727

Region 5

U.S. EPA—Region 5
230 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 353-2000

Region 6

U.S. EPA—Region 6
First Interstate Bank Tower
1445 Ross Avenue
Dallas, TX 75270-2793
(214) 655-6444

Region 7

U.S. EPA—Region 7
720 Minnesota Avenue
Kansas City, KS 65101
(913) 551-7000

Region 8

U.S. EPA—Region 8
Denver Place (811WM-RI)
999 18th Street, Suite 500
Denver, CO 80202-2405
(303) 293-1603

Region 9

U.S. EPA—Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 744-2095

Region 10

U.S. EPA—Region 10
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 442-1200

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(OS-305)
401 M Street SW
Washington, DC 20460

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